The abenaki, the original inhabitants of Vermont and southern Quebec, knew that when the red squirrels bit the twigs of the sugar maple, it was time to collect the tree’s sap and boil off the water to make the “nectar almost sacred” that is maple syrup.1 It’s over five thousand years later, and some things have not changed: pure Vermont maple syrup is still truly all natural, with no additives, and 100 percent organic! For most of us here in the North Country today, it is the ruts in the road—the “viscous, tire-sucking, muffler-wrenching, world-class glutinous pudding”2 of mud season—that herald the arrival of above-freezing daytime temperatures, and with them the unique, fleeting magic of sugaring season. We search eagerly for a glimpse of the rising steam beckoning from our neighbor’s sugarhouse or the soft glow of light in the pitch-black woods as we drive home under the watchful eye of Orion in the southwest night sky. But this year there has been precious little steam; whether due to global warming or just plain bad luck, the temperatures seem to have been deaf to the dance music of the season, hopping up when they were supposed to sink, plummeting when the caller said jump. And so the sap isn’t running, and our neighbor, who normally produces 500 gallons of syrup in a good year, has made only 50 so far. At thirty-two dollars a gallon (and much more per ounce for the smaller bottles favored by tourists), that 450-gallon shortfall represents a substantial loss of income for a farmer whose other products (tomatoes, corn, zucchini, etc.) typically sell at his farm stand for twenty-five to forty cents apiece.

Sugaring is neither a manufacturing process nor a quaint traditional craft performed to amuse “flatlanders,” as nonnative Vermonters are called. It is a key to the economic and spiritual well-being of Vermont, a bond that ties us to our ancestors and to our community. The red squirrel wanders off and leaves the punctured bark, returning to eat the crystallized maple sugar after the water in the sap has evaporated.3 But for humans the long hours of boiling needed to concentrate the sap fortyfold and the careful attention required to avoid burning the pan make sugaring, like most aspects of farming, remarkably labor intensive. Sugaring-off parties bring friends and neighbors together to share in the work and the rewards; the sweet-smelling, moist atmosphere envelops us, and stories and laughter emerge from disembodied voices in the thick cloud of steam as we wait to draw off the first tastes of the finished syrup.4

With 6,400 farms, at an average of just under 200 acres per farm, Vermont is a glaring anomaly on the contemporary American agricultural landscape.4 In the northern plains, for example, the average farm size in 1995 was almost 1,000 acres.5 Seventy-two percent of the national harvest is produced by only 8 percent of the country’s farms.6 In the face of this vast, centralized, industrial-scale production system, Americans’ food-based connections with others revolve almost exclusively around eating, rather than around a shared experience of harvesting or producing. In considering the processes by which our food is made, how many of us can echo the sentiment of one octogenarian Vermonter at a
sugaring-off gathering: “You know, I don’t mind dying, but I sure am going to miss sugaring.”

Farmer and entrepreneur Tod Murphy has a vision—one that he hopes will foster exactly this sense of community and connectedness—of a national network of diner-style restaurants that draw on the local farmers and producers for most or all of their food. The first establishment in Murphy’s proposed chain, the Farmer’s Diner in Barre, Vermont, returns sixty-five cents of every dollar spent to the local economy by buying from farmers and small-scale producers who live and work within seventy miles of the diner. Wider implementation of the concept will depend on the ability of the organizers to bring together groups of local, preferably organic, producers, business leaders, and investors to create “pods” of diners in a given geographical area. The first Farmer’s Diner is not unlike a growing sector of the restaurant business that highlights its use of locally produced organic food, although many other such restaurants tend to occupy the expensive end of the restaurant spectrum, and most incorporate local products to a lesser extent. The key innovation that sets the Farmer’s Diner endeavor apart is the creation of local “commissaries” to process the fresh meat and produce for the diners within the pod while marketing excess to other local inns and high-end grocery stores. Murphy’s dream is to provide a market for small- and medium-scale organic farmers while allowing both the producers and the diners to benefit from an economy of scale that guarantees a consistent stream of inputs for the chefs and a profitable revenue source for neighboring farmers. The project’s Web site explains, the goal is to combine “time-tested restaurant-chain basics with socially-responsible economics and operations.”

Three recent books share Murphy’s vision of keeping small- and medium-scale family farming viable while making wholesome, locally grown food available at prices that more people can afford. A central theme in each of these books is the notion of a sustainable approach to farming, one that incorporates not just the federal regulations governing organic agriculture but a relationship with the land and a return to the values from which the organic farming movement has grown. According to these authors, and to many within the organic farming community, a new paradigm is needed to reaffirm the spirit of community and connection between producers and consumers, and between soil fertility and food production on the land that we, as stewards, hold in trust.

The most engaging of the trio is This Common Ground: Seasons on an Organic Farm by farmer and poet Scott Chaskey. Part journal, part memoir, this book provides a fascinating glimpse into the challenges and joys of creating a more sustainable food production system through community-supported agriculture (CSA). Chaskey is, above all, an educator who seeks to share both his passion for the land and some of the many insights he has acquired in fifteen years of organic farming on the eastern tip of New York’s Long Island. With an abundance of subtle humor and the keen observational skills of a born naturalist, the author traces his path from casual gardener to head farmer for hundreds of acres in a land trust that provides food to two hundred families and several local restaurants and food pantries, as well as a school. Interspersing nuggets of gardening wisdom passed on by his aged mentor in Cornwall, England, with whimsical vignettes, such as his experiences sharing a field with a family of foxes, Chaskey chronicles one year of activities on the Quail Hill CSA.

Chaskey’s detailed descriptions of how and when to plant garlic or the twenty varieties of potatoes grown at Quail Hill, while occasionally prosaic, coalesce with his musings on modern agriculture into a labor of love that is so much more than a simple gardening manual. The author skillfully incorporates quotes from the poets Walt Whitman and Rainer Maria Rilke, the environmentalist Wendell Berry, and many others, but he is not afraid to give equal time to Mole from The Wind in the Willows. His segues occasionally feel a little random, but by and large his opus succeeds at several levels. Chaskey’s recommendations on the soil characteristics and staking techniques that work best for tomatoes, and the results of the farm’s yearly Tomato Tasting contest, will be a godsend to every amateur gardener and gourmet cook hoping to experiment with something other than the standard five varieties available at the local hardware store. The book mentions in passing several sources for these unusual varieties and includes an extensive reading list of writings that have influenced the storyteller (as Chaskey calls himself), but the value of this resource could easily have been enhanced by including contact information in the appendix for the seed providers mentioned. Digging into this book is less efficient but far more rewarding than perusing seed catalogs; it can be an easy read or a quick reference, but it is best savored, allowing the poetry, the gardening advice, and the social commentary to simmer together as Chaskey intended into thought-provoking insights for the casual gardener and the serious farmer alike.

Of the three authors Chaskey is the most adept at seasoning his sermons with amusing anecdotes, including accounts of his voluminous correspondence with a local pastor and CSA member who is partial to brussels sprouts; the history of a tomato variety called “Radiator Charlie’s Mortgage Lifter”; and a tribute, with a quote from E.B.
White, to the local welder and tire dealer who keeps the
cantankerous farm equipment functioning: “A good farmer
is nothing more nor less than a handy man with a sense of
humus” (p.96). But what Chaskey is really documenting is a
community-building endeavor, in this case with a cast of
local characters as colorful as the 225 heirloom varieties he
cultivates. The philosophical foundation of a CSA is the shar-
ing of financial risk among all the members, insulating the
farmer from the type of hardship that capricious weather
inflicts on farmers and that contributes to the loss of hun-
sands of family farms each week.11 Chaskey’s experience
shows that a CSA’s shareholders can feel even more invested
in the enterprise when they participate in the cultivation
and harvesting, sustaining the earth physically as well as
economically by bringing their food scraps back to the farm
for composting. “We are here to create and renew daily con-
dversations, among children of all ages, against the backdrop
of a mature apple tree, a wave of sunflowers, rows of garlic
rising out of straw. And we’re here to continue to ques-
tion….As we admire the harvest and create a community,
can we also begin to build a new commons?” (p.140).

One component of Chaskey’s view of the commons is
that “family farms without strong local markets cannot sur-
vive, nor can the land those families farm” (p.122). The
Farmer’s Diner model is one attempt to address this problem,
ideally while preserving the vanishing class of eating estab-
lishment where the waitress addresses us by name as she
pours our coffee, a meeting place small and intimate enough
that we know all the other patrons and rely on them for our
daily news updates. Institutions, including several East
Coast colleges and universities, have also taken this lesson
to heart, contracting directly with local farms to purchase
produce, meat, and milk to serve in the dining halls.12
Spurred not just by a sense of communal responsibility or
the desire to preserve their bucolic settings, these colleges
are responding to growing student demand for better-tasting
food produced with fewer negative environmental impacts.
Imbued with the same sense of consumer entitlement that
is driving many aspects of contemporary culinary revision-
ism, these students are contributing to the explosive growth
of the Real Food movement.

In The Real Food Revival Sherri Brooks Vinton and Ann
Clark Espuelas team up to define Real Food as organic, slow,
local, sustainable, and produced using fair-trade practices;
the authors set out to prove that it can also be affordable
and accessible (p.xiii). Their pithy retelling of the facts is
neatly organized by “MegaMart” aisles, with one chapter each
devoted to produce, meats, fish, dairy, sugars/oil/sweeteners,
convenience foods, and beverages. This structure, along
with the authors’ chatty, sometimes glib style, makes this
book exceptionally easy to skim. Initial appearances
notwithstanding, there is actually a fair amount of factual
meat on the bones of this volume, including decent-looking
recipes and little morsels of information that are almost
certainly not common knowledge (e.g., codes on produce
beginning with 9 indicate organic, while those commencing
in 8 mark fruits and vegetables that are genetically modified
[p.31]).13 The chapter on grains and oils, with its descriptions
of unusual grains and Internet links to Native American
sources for traditional strains of corn, will be especially
appealing to weekend gourmet. Tips on purchasing fair-
trade coffee are handy, but a similar section on chocolate
would also have been very welcome.14 The extensive
appendix, filled with online resources, references, and
endnotes is particularly useful but deceptive. Indeed, the
major shortcoming of this book is the overreliance on
alarming assertions that, while probably true, are not
documented with citations.15

Not surprising, processed foods come in for the most
scathing indictment by Vinton and Espuelas. As readers of
Gastronomica hardly need to be reminded, “If you are doing
your own cooking, you have total control over the ingredients”
(p.190). In contrast, convenience foods “are the garbage
dump of the food industry. They are the sponge that absorbs,
by the ton, the surplus commodity crops that we don’t need
but can’t seem to stop making too much of, and they are
the final destination for scraps from butchering” (p.181).
Nowhere is this more evident than in the magnitude of
our high-fructose corn syrup consumption, the result of vast
overproduction of corn driven by government subsidies—
costs to the taxpayer that may well be multiplied many times
over in future health-care bills by the precipitous increase in
type 2 diabetes rates. According to Andrew Kimbrell’s book
Fatal Harvest,16 Americans consume the equivalent of one
pound of sugar, primarily in the form of high-fructose corn
syrup, per person every sixty hours!

Vinton and Espuelas make a compelling case for a
return to freshly prepared, wholesome food, and they succeed
in helping the reader envision a transition to such alternatives.
One of the most encouraging images of the future is their
profile of the Ross School in East Hampton, New York,
where both lunch (featuring gourmet pizzas and abundant
fresh produce) and student attitudes toward nutrition have
undergone a complete makeover; one is left with the strong
suspicions, however, that such a transformation might not be
nearly as likely in a large, conventional public high school
with far fewer financial resources.17 Mindful of the perception
that Real Food is expensive and takes more effort to
prepare, the authors do offer recommendations on time-saving economical options, and one of the most innovative sets of hints is the section on starting your own buying club. (Readers will be relieved to hear that imports are not necessarily forbidden.) The book suffers from a few notable omissions (e.g., including only a cursory suggestion to can summer vegetables, when a full set of instructions would have been entirely consistent with the tenor of the book).

Nonetheless, the authors are to be commended for identifying one of the most vexing and fundamental questions about Real Food: is there a place at the table for the burgeoning “industrial organic” share of the market? Vinton and Espuelas hone in on shortcomings of a system of national standards that stipulate the types of feed and medications that an organic chicken can receive and mandate access to the outdoors but do not require that the chicken actually ever venture out that open door. But faced with the choice of two elaborately packaged minicontainers of eggs from the same company, both of them “organically produced in the fresh air of the White Mountains of New Hampshire,” both of them containing the same amount of Omega-3 but “no medications, antibiotics, or pesticides,” should a consumer choose the half-dozen eggs from chickens that were “certified humane raised and handled” or those from the “cage-free vegetarian-fed” hens?

A crucial point in the industrial-scale organic debate is the question of access to premium-quality (and premium-priced) produce, juices, meat, and dairy products. Until recently, organic foods were seen as a niche item, marketed primarily to the wealthy, but “72% of conventional grocery stores now carry some organic food” (Duram, p.4) and 70 percent of Americans have purchased at least one organic food product. In our rural corner of Vermont, where 78 percent of the children qualify for federal or state healthcare assistance, many people do not have the option of dithering in the grocery store aisle over whether it’s better to purchase the locally produced but nonorganic butter, the organic butter produced by a national conglomerate, or the cholesterol-free, non-GMO, non-trans-fat-containing butter substitute, because every one of these items is several-fold more expensive than a pound of margarine. Wal-Mart is now the largest purveyor of organic foods in the nation, and the industrial-scale organic behemoth that supplies this “Evil Empire,” while campaigning diligently to dilute the organic standards, is in fact bringing a variety of health benefits, including higher nutrient content and lower levels of nitrates and heavy metals, to consumers who would otherwise not be able to afford such “luxuries.”

Big businesses such as Cascadian Farm (a subsidiary of General Mills), which adhere to the letter of the national organic standards while employing industrial growing and distribution practices that ignore the environmental and social tenets of the organic farming movement, are also a target of Leslie Duram’s Good Growing: Why Organic Farming Works. At the opposite end of the spectrum from the breezy, casual tone of The Real Food Revival, Duram’s tome is packed with earnest “advocacy scholarship” (p.xii). If the former book is a Sunday afternoon stroll in the countryside, the initial impression is that the latter will require a machete to slog through the thicket of facts and statistics. The first few chapters are indeed a dense treatise, fully referenced, on organic certification rules, scientific studies on the potential risks of pesticides, and comparative surveys of productivity in organic versus conventional agriculture. The most riveting parts of the book are the astute insights that emerge from the (overly long) interviews with five certified organic farmers. These farmers decry the lack of research into organic practices at the land-grant universities, which are too beholden to major chemical and seed corporations for their research funding to provide extension support for anything but conventional agriculture. Another concern is the potential lack of integrity in the organic standards as applied to imported produce. As one organic marketing specialist from California observes, “The common Mexican citizen couldn’t care less whether the produce going north of the border is really organic or not. Why should they? They are looking at us as having way too much money and using way too many resources. They just don’t have any incentives as far as I can tell, whereas in the United States the local people are watching” (p.173).

It is not until the final chapter that Duram really finds her own voice, advocating a series of fundamental changes in the way society views “sustainable agriculture.” She points out that we tend to envision organic farming as the solution to all of our ecological and social woes, from diminishing biodiversity and soil fertility to the demise of the family farm, the rural landscape, and agricultural knowledge among city dwellers. Duram recognizes that a CSA such as Chaskey’s, which does in fact address each of these concerns effectively, cannot satisfy the nation’s insatiable appetite for an infinite variety of cheap food, conveniently packaged, even when it’s out of season. Chef Dan Barber, writing recently in a New York Times editorial, concurs: “Small farmers and farmers’ markets, as much as we want them to, are simply not in the position right now to save American agriculture.” Like Duram, Barber decries the commodity arms race in which farms are under constant pressure to increase their yield of a single grain destined to be converted into highly processed junk food just to expand their share of the subsidy pork...
barrel. Both authors call for substantially increased government support for the shrinking sector of midsize farms that cultivate more than 40 percent of our farmland and could supply a national market.5 Barber wants the government to help these farmers—“small-business owners [who are] highly effective stewards of the land, with intimate knowledge of their farms and their communities”27—make the transition to whole foods and more ecologically sound practices, while Duram advocates a more dramatic shift in the structure of our food production and distribution system. In her vision government-funded programs would pay farmers to adopt organic practices and subsidize the three-year transition to organic certification, during which farmers cannot yet reap the price premium for the organic label but face lower yields as they learn how to manage the pests in chemically independent ways. Duram’s most innovative recommendation is that we create a new certification label called “Fair Share” to mark products untainted by agribusiness corporations and grown by family farmers who received at least 75 percent of the consumer price (as opposed to the 10 percent the farmer typically garners); furthermore, she would like to see all produce, meat, and dairy products labeled with state or country of origin so that consumers can opt for local products where possible.

Vinton and Espuelas likewise argue that it is more important to “support a family-owned and -operated farm that honors the land and community but may not be certified organic than it is to purchase certified organic produce from half-way around the world.”12 In fact, there is not even agreement that organic foods are any more likely to promote long-term human health than conventional foods,29 and we have nowhere near enough years of data to begin to address this question rigorously. For the moment it seems prudent to follow the recommendations of the Environmental Working Group, which lists certain types of produce, including apples, bell peppers, celery, cherries, imported grapes, nectarines, peaches, pears, potatoes, red raspberries, spinach, and strawberries, which often have high levels of residual pesticides when grown conventionally and should therefore be high priorities for organic buying whenever it is feasible.30

Less disputable are the environmental costs of our current food production practices, including spraying noxious pesticides on our land and transporting food across the country and around the globe. Currently, each calorie of food on our table requires 10 calories of nonsolar energy to produce, mostly from petrochemicals used for chemical inputs, fuel for farm machinery, and transportation. This “means that each of us eats the equivalent of thirteen barrels of oil a year.”21 While organic agriculture may reduce the consumption of fossil fuels used to make fertilizer, there is still an imbalance in the equation if petroleum, rather than human energy, is the chief source of calories expended on watering, weeding, seeding, pest management, and transport to market. And no matter how much human energy is applied, soils are washed away in heavy rains, nutrients leach to lower soil strata, and pests can easily gain the upper hand, especially on organic monocultures. Yet our current emphasis on today’s productivity masks the negative impacts of erosion and growing pest populations on future food production potential.32

A common theme in all three books is this depletion of soil fertility and the critical need to return to a more holistic approach that favors polyculture (epitomized by the Native American practice of interplanting the “three sisters”—corn, squash, and beans) in place of rampant overuse of chemical fertilizers. A fundamental principle of polyculture is that the more interactions there are among plants, soil organisms, and the animal world, the more resistant the ecosystem becomes to external stresses, and the more productive it can be—in the same way that a village is a much stronger social structure than a small homesteading family in an isolated corner of the wilderness. One study showed that “three sisters” polyculture can produce 4 million calories per acre as opposed to 3.4 million calories for corn alone.33 Yet, according to Vinton and Espuelas, over 80 percent of the total cultivated acreage in the nation is planted in corn, soybean, or wheat, and the vast majority of these cereal crops are grown as monocultures (p.116). The take-home message from each of these authors is that we need more farmers who are committed to more sustainable farming practices. But in the end only Duram is willing to admit that, in fact, most forms of modern agriculture are inherently unsustainable in that they fail to take into account the larger issues such as ecological balance and social relations between producers and consumers (p.87).

What would truly sustainable agriculture look like? Consider how nature has evolved to deal with the issues of fertility, erosion, and pest control. Water is pumped to the surface (and in some cases shared with other plants) by deep-rooted trees, and substantial amounts of water are stored in spongy rich soils of the woods—protecting against flooding and soil loss. Fertilization may be a slow and limited process in nature, but in many areas there is sufficient fertilization from such sources as leguminous plants, decaying leaves and roots, soil organisms, animal manures, and breakdown of minerals to support a wide variety of plants.34 Nutrient recycling is also achieved when deep-rooted plants recapture leached nutrients that would be lost in most
monocultures. That is, “natural ecosystems regulate crucial materials so that inputs approximately equal outputs in a steady state.”\textsuperscript{35} And pest control is achieved not only with plants that attract and nourish predatory insects but by a subterranean mat of fungi that connects to the roots of perennials in order to exchange nutrients, while in many cases protecting the roots from bacterial pathogens by exuding antibiotics.\textsuperscript{36}

“New” forms of agriculture, designed to capitalize on these complex networks of ecological relationships, are being pursued experimentally in many regions of the world. The primary goal of one such approach, dubbed permaculture by Australian proponent Bill Mollison, is to create ecosystems that mimic the indigenous biological communities of a given area while maximizing the number of edible species and maintaining natural mechanisms for fertility, irrigation, and pest control.\textsuperscript{37} Once established, permacultures can last for many years with little human intervention, but the initial development is an expert’s game and can take years, and productivity (edibles produced per unit area) is limited by natural processes in most parts of the world. On the opposite end of the spectrum is high-density farming, which utilizes space-maximizing tricks such as trellises and hanging baskets to create “multistory” gardens. Using this technique, one southern California family has managed to achieve eye-popping yields: three tons of food, constituting more than three hundred plant species, grown without chemical pesticides or fertilizer on one-tenth of an acre in suburban Pasadena. This represents approximately 60 to 150 times the efficiency of an industrial field of rice or corn.\textsuperscript{38} No one approach is going to dramatically alter our food production system overnight, but some combination of these innovative models, coupled with a commitment to real stewardship of the land, may allow us to eat more healthily while maintaining the future carrying capacity of our limited natural resources.

According to Abenaki oral tradition, there was a time, long ago, when ready-made syrup, thick as honey with no boiling needed, flowed from the maple trees year round. But the people grew fat and lazy, because they did nothing but lie around on their backs under the trees, moaning with contentment as they let the syrup drip from broken branches into their mouths. Their fields became overgrown, the villages fell into disrepair, and the fires went out.\textsuperscript{39} When the Creator heard what had happened, he decided that the people needed to learn a lesson. The maple trees were filled with water so that the people would have to work hard to make the syrup. And the sap now flows sweet only once a year, before the new spring, so the people will remember to cherish the gift from the land.

As a society we have likewise been lulled almost comatosely by our addiction to ready-made sweeteners and effort-free gorging. To recover our nutritional, ecological, and spiritual balance, we need to build communities of food producers and consumers rooted in a network of social relationships that honor the intrinsic value of both food and farmer and supported by an understanding of the plant communities and soil biology that make truly sustainable farming possible.\textsuperscript{40}

\textbf{Notes}

9. The Cornell University business school Social Venture competition has calculated that “every $1,000,000 in annual sales at a diner translates into 350 acres of farmland in production, 15 farmers with gross sales of $50,000, 13 new farm jobs, and $1,200,000 in land conservation costs saved. Because of local production and shortened delivery routes each $1 million in sales saves at least 10 tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually”; see http://www.farmersdiner.com.
10. Ibid.
12. All the milk served at Williams College, for example, comes from the local dairy Highlawn Farm, which raises only grass-fed, hormone-free cows. Dining Services at Williams also uses locally raised grass-fed beef and purchases over 50 percent of the produce grown (including eight thousand pounds of butternut squash and more than three thousand heads of lettuce) at Peace Valley Farm in Williamstown, Massachusetts. At Yale University, chef Alice Waters (of the legendary Chez Panise in Berkeley, California) facilitated the transition to exclusively locally grown, organic food in one of the twelve dining halls. Students at Yale and at Middlebury College grow their own organic produce in gardens on the college campus.
13. Another important tidbit is that the increasingly common practice of finishing a grass-fed animal on grain before slaughter, while far preferable to feeding it entirely grain (see Lois Banta, “In The Belly of the Beast,” \textit{Gastronomica} 4 (no. 4. 106-10), makes the meat richer in undesirable saturated fat while diminishing the levels of beneficial fats such as conjugated linoleic acid and Omega-3; see Vinton and Espuelas, \textit{Real Food Revival}, 55.
15. See, for example, the discussion of mad cow disease and the potential spread of bacterial pathogens in feedlots (pp.45-46).
17. Nonetheless, according to the March 2006 edition of the \textit{Highbower Lowdown}, more than four hundred school districts and two hundred university cafeterias are utilizing fresh local ingredients; for example, an “organic choice” movement has blossomed from the efforts of one concerned mother to include all the elementary
schools in Olympia, Washington. In a development that could serve as a model for other states or local school districts, the Vermont State House has approved a “Farm to Schools” bill that will pave the way for Vermont farmers’ produce to be used in school cafeterias across the state.

18. Vinton and Espuelas, Real Food Revival, 168.
19. Duram, Good Growing, 89.
20. Ibid., 70.
21. Personal communication from Sue Andrews; statistic provided by Vermont Department of Prevention, Assistance, Transition, and Health Access, 6 October 2003.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Vinton and Espuelas, Real Food Revival, 27.
29. *MarketWatch*, 16 January 2006. Some of this skepticism may be based, however, on false reporting. Duram reports that the ABC television show 20/20 claimed to have commissioned lab tests for pesticides on conventionally grown food; months later the “finding” that these foods lacked pesticide residue was retracted when the show’s reporter admitted that the lab test had never been performed (p.89).
30. Duram, Good Growing, 166.
36. http://www.ibiblio.org/london/ргfarm/faq/mycor.html#4. Some of this skepticism may be based, however, on false reporting. Duram reports that the ABC television show 20/20 claimed to have commissioned lab tests for pesticides on conventionally grown food; months later the “finding” that these foods lacked pesticide residue was retracted when the show’s reporter admitted that the lab test had never been performed (p.89).
40. A fascinating and potentially paradigm-shifting article has just been published that revisits the question of comparative yields in organic versus conventional farming. Brian Halweil (*WorldWatch* 19: no. 3, 18-24) reviews a number of recent studies and concludes that organic yields can match or even surpass conventional yields. Importantly, in these comparisons organic cultivation practices fare best in developing countries where most of the world’s poor live. Halweil cites a number of agricultural experts who advocate a “middle path of eco-agriculture, or low-input agriculture that uses many of the principles of organic farming and depends on just a small fraction of the chemicals.” This integrated approach “often out-performs both a strictly organic and chemical-intensive approach in terms of yield, economics, and environmental benefits.”